

Newspaper: Providence Journal

Date: July 7, 2007

# Activists pleased by passage of bills

While the state's budget crisis cast a negative shadow over the recently concluded session of the General Assembly, environmental advocates came away

**PETER B. LORD**

ENVIRONMENTAL  
JOURNAL



with a generally positive attitude about bills that passed, and even a few that didn't.

They had no success with legislation that would have made widespread governmental changes to support and encourage drinking water supplies in Rhode Island. But several advocates said it was a complex issue and they hope to have some success with it next year now that the General Assembly is more aware of the problems.

But they were pleased that bills did pass to:

- Implement the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, with its focus on capping and reducing pollutants from power plants that contribute to global warming. The plan will help ratepayers in Rhode Island, because they can auction pollution allowances to power plant operators elsewhere, creating a fund that could benefit consumers. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Arthur Handy, D-Cranston, and Sen. Dennis L. Algiere, R-Westerly.

- Enact new standards to reduce runoff pollution from development on the coastline. The standards are in bills sponsored by Sen. Paul E. Moura, D-East Providence, and Raymond J. Sullivan Jr., D-Coventry.

- Require the replacement of cesspools at all properties when they are sold and at properties that are in critical areas near water sources or

shorelines. Similar bills have been under consideration for years. This one was sponsored by Rep. Donna M. Walsh, D-Charlestown.

- Require many full-size diesel school buses to be adapted with technologies designed to reduce pollution. State Rep. Peter T. Ginaitt, D-Warwick, and Moura were the sponsors.

Matt Auten, a lobbyist with Environment Rhode Island, an advocacy group, said several of the bills passed literally in the legislature's final hours, even though they had been under consideration for months.

"The two top issues were the greenhouse gas initiative and the DEM storm-water bill, and both were approved late the final night," Auten said.

He said environmentalists were hoping for some action on the state's drinking water problems, but they also understood the bills proposed in both houses were a lot to absorb for legislators.

Advocates also appreciated that both houses passed resolutions encouraging the state to consider a land swap that would avoid the proposed sale of state land on Watchaug Pond and encourage the sale of land in South Kingstown to become part of the federal wildlife refuge system. The land sale was proposed by Governor Carcieri in his budget and stayed in the version approved by the legislature. But a spokesman said no sale would happen unless the administration initiated it.

"If this deal does go through, it will be the ultimate in making lemonade out of lemons," Auten said. "[But] I hope it doesn't encourage the state to try to sell more undeveloped property."

The diesel bill was praised by a wide range of environ-

mental groups. Denise Parrillo of Clean Water Action called it "a bold step in protecting Rhode Island's children."